




(U) Back from Baghdad (repost)


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A first-hand account of what it's like to work in Baghdad. This story ran on October 20th... (U)

(C) In May we interviewed Mark Cronin as he prepared to take over the responsibilities of NCR Iraq (see the article ["Before and After: Headed for Baghdad"](#)). Mr. Cronin returned from Baghdad last month and told us of his experiences there. Here is the "after" part of his story...

(C) How was his tour? Well, in a nutshell, Mr. Cronin describes it as "a great experience" -- the best tour he's had in 28 years in the cryptologic community. His primary concern in Baghdad was the health and safety of the people under his supervision, and fortunately no one was injured during his 101 days on site. However, the long periods of quiet were punctuated by moments of sheer terror. A trying point in his tour occurred when the site experienced mortar attacks for five consecutive nights. Their workplaces were hit twice -- once by a mortar and once by a rocket. Although one of the attacks caused "amazing" damage, both of the State department personnel near the blast survived, with one of them being sent back to the States for medical treatment.


Mortar round hits roof


Damage inside work area

(U//FOUO) During Mr. Cronin's tour, the Coalition Provisional Authority, under Ambassador Paul Bremer, handed over governing authority to the Iraq Transitional Government. This marked a major change, as the U.S. officials were now advisors, as opposed to decision-makers. The early handover, on May 28 instead of June 1st, was designed to disrupt any planned terrorist activity. This date change was a well kept secret even among the inner circle at the Embassy. Both Ambassador Bremer and the U.S. Ambassador to the new government, John Negroponte, were avid users of SIGINT. On more than one occasion, Ambassador Bremer made a major policy decision based on SIGINT information alone.

(S) His tour also coincided with the start of Cryptologic Support Team (CST) deployments of SIGINTers to work with military division-level personnel in Iraq. Mr. Cronin believes that this was a good idea, and he expects the effort to be a success. He added that this will give the SIGINT system better insight into U.S. tactical operations.

(C) The feedback Mr. Cronin received on NSA's SIGINT was extremely positive -- he found both our military and political customers to be very satisfied with what they were receiving. In fact, customers relied on SIGINT to an even greater degree than he expected. They considered SIGINT to be their key source for information they couldn't get anywhere else. Customers told Mr. Cronin (and the NSA Director, when he visited), to "Keep doing what you are doing."

(C) Policy-makers want to hear more than SIGINT fact from NSA -- they appreciated analyst's comments, and considered SIGINT assessment reports to be "pure gold." Customers went out of their way to ask for more. Mr. Cronin also found the Iraq IMT* to be a "great, one-stop-shopping" way of communicating with elements back at Fort Meade. He also had very productive dealings with [NSOC](#), and established good working relationships with the SOOs**.

(U//FOUO) Mr. Cronin did have some limited opportunities to mix with the Iraqi population, such as in a marketplace. His impression was that the Iraqis were happy to be rid of the Saddam

Hussein regime, but resented the U.S. occupation of their country. The heat and dust in Iraq are worse than he anticipated (the daily high temperature was never below 100 degrees during his entire tour), but the living quarters were better than he expected.

(S) In terms of his daily routine, Mr. Cronin attended a 0630 meeting with General Casey 6 days per week, and an 0830 Ambassador's Country Team meeting 4 times per week. Beyond that, however, there was no regular "routine" to his day. As Ambassador Bremer stated, "There are three days in Iraq - yesterday, today, and tomorrow." Because of the time difference between the U.S. and Iraq, Mr. Cronin's workday (typically lasting 15 hours for 101 days straight), was divided into an "Iraq day" and a "U.S. day." SIGINT analysts in country (about 100, in total) usually worked shifts of 12-hours-on/12-hours-off. Despite the hardships, the SIGINTers in country had "overall, extremely high morale."

(C) Mr. Cronin learned a lot during his tour and had unforgettable experiences. Would he do it again? Yes, he would. What's next for him? -- He's now headed off to Thailand to begin language training prior to his assignment as NCR Thailand in the Summer of 2005.

(U) Notes:

*IMT = Issue Management Team

**SOO = Senior Operations Officers

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